CHAPTER XV

1872-1875

"Kant refuted by Dint of Muscle"—Articles on Buckle—The "Revulsion"—Articles on Strauss—Friends of the Period—Meeting with Emerson—Visit to Wales—Candidature of Emerson for Rectorship of Glasgow University—Letters from Emerson

It was in 1872 that the first of Stirling's works on Kant appeared in the form of an article in the *Fortnightly Review*. It was a review of a book, written in German and published in Germany, though its author (by name Montgomery) was evidently British, which professed to be a refutation of Kant's theory of perception from the side of empiricism. Stirling gave his review the somewhat curious title, "Kant refuted by Dint of Muscle," for the reason that, as he said, "It is certainly by muscle that he [Mr Montgomery] would destroy Kant." The Kantian "perceptions" he explains by muscular actions; our conceptions of time and space by "certain muscular actions successively experienced, and reproduced in memory as a collective unity."

To such views as those, as might be expected, Stirling gives no quarter. But his review is more than a criticism of Mr Montgomery's book. With his usual thoroughness, before beginning his attack on the book in question, he has to show what it deals with, and this involves, not only a brief outline of Kant's theory of perception, but a statement in a word or two of the standpoints of his immediate predecessors in philosophy. "The philosophy of Kant," he says, "like every genuine philosophy, is in strict historical connection with that which im-

mediately precedes it. It is an extension on, and of, the ideas of Leibnitz, Locke and Hume."

In a former chapter of the present book, it was said that it was through the door of *causality* that Kant passed into his system. The meaning of this remark is very plainly shown in the review under discussion. Kant's immediate predecessor, Hume, had maintained that we derived the notion of causality, *Every change must have a cause*, entirely from experience; that it was only through finding certain events (causes and effects) *constantly associated*, that we concluded that they were *necessarily connected*. Custom alone was the explanation of the *necessity* we seem to find in the principle.

"Kant saw that the human mind felt the proposition, *Every change must have a cause*, to be *necessarily* and *universally* true, and that to that necessity and universality *no association of custom could amount*. Whatever we know from having experienced it, we know *is*, but not that it *must be*. If there be a *must*, then, in any matter of knowledge, that *must* is in excess of the *is*—is in excess of experience. But there is a *must* in the proposition of causality—every change *must* have a cause—and it must have a source elsewhere than in experience. . . . There is undoubtedly, then, says Kant, an *à priori* [*i.e.*, something previous to, or independent of, experience] in human knowledge, and my business is to discover its source, its limits, and its general nature . . . where can this *à priori* lie? Plainly not in what we owe to sense as it is *materially* affected. All that is materially known by the five senses—colours, sounds, odours, savours, etc.—is only *à posteriori* known . . . we know that it *is*, but not that it *must be*. The *à priori* element, therefore, cannot be due to the *matter* of the senses, but only to something in their own native form or function, or in that of the cognitive faculties. Let us inquire, then, into the *function* of *all* our cognitive faculties in search of this *à priori* element."

This passage gives us a very simple and brief explanation of Kant's general aim. The review goes on to follow Kant in his analysis of the

cognitive faculties, with wonderful fullness and minuteness, considering the space, and there are even two or three pages devoted to the subject of Hegel's relation to Kant, which are exceedingly clear and light-giving, before the direct attack on Mr Montgomery, for which what precedes is, more or less, a necessary preparation, actually begins. That attack we cannot give here; there is space only for the final paragraph of the article. Speaking of Mr Montgomery's "ecstatic adoration of the empiricists, and equally ecstatic denunciations of the philosophers," the reviewer concludes thus:—

"He [Mr Montgomery] will see better yet, however; he will get enough of this, and turn from it. He will see what reaction to this Kant was, and what necessity for this reaction there both was and is. He will come to know that physiology cannot do precisely what is wanted, and that his present recourse to what he calls "the veritable act of living nature," is a recourse also to an *unrationalized nature*, which is the negation of philosophy, the negation of thought. He will come to see that he must abandon the cognitive faculty in the subject, and apply himself to the cognitive function on the object, which no physiology can explain. Lastly, he will come to see that we are sense *and* thought, and that he destroys the very possibility of the latter in making the former all; that philosophers, as philosophers . . . are the friends of science, the friends of law, the friends of intellectual activity everywhere, and that it is really the sensationalists he admires who, shut up in the mysticism of an unexplained and unintelligible chaos of sense, throw all into the unknown, and dwell in a dogmatism, an obscurantism, and an intolerance peculiar to themselves, and painful for others to witness."

Two or three months before the appearance of the *Kant* article in the *Fortnightly*, there was published (in July 1872) in the *North American Review* the first of Stirling's articles on Buckle, which he himself regarded as amongst his best work.

On his own copy of the review, Stirling has written, by way of motto, these words from Hegel, "*Der Dünkel der Unreife*," which practically con-

stitute a summary of his opinion of the writer whom he is reviewing. Buckle, in fact, belonged to the Aufklärung, and not to the earlier period of the movement, when it had its justification, but to what Stirling called the *Revulsion*—the period of reaction to the *negative*, which followed the time of the ascendency of Scott and Wordsworth and Carlyle, when "the previous Humian *negative* was rebuked, and there was an *affirmative* fostered, if only of the imagination."

In Stirling's letters to Ingleby there occur frequent references to the *Revulsion*, and the "men of the Revulsion," some of which it is thought will be found interesting here, both for the light which they throw on the subject, and the characteristic way in which they are expressed.

"Revulsion," he writes in April 1870, "is my own word, and what I mean by it is precisely explained towards the end of the Preface of the *S. of H.* . . . The Aufklärung, beginning with religion, threw off the filling-out of our carcases, and left us in the somewhat conceitedly jejune condition in which Wordsworth and Coleridge found us. Then, there was the reaction which, *in consequence of the support of philosophy not being supplied to it*, has been, in this country, followed by the Revulsion—Aufklärung further thin-ified and conceit-ified into *Aufklärerei*—see *passim* those four shallow, stiff, thin, conceited prigs — weak-heads, or soft-heads, or empty-heads, or wrong-heads respectively—Mill, Bain, Buckle, Grote. . . . The Aufklärung has simply reduced all to abstract *understanding*, philosophy would restore concrete *reason*."

In a letter written in August of the same year there occurs this passage bearing on the subject: "The question here is of a practical doctrine which I view as the most baneful, at the same time that it is the most shallow possible. What am I to do?

I cannot speak softly of what I believe to be wicked — I must then submit to be mistaken by the ignoscant critic who sees in Stirling only an envious younger rival of the older and greater Mill."

The following passage, from a letter dated Oct. 20, 1871, is perhaps peculiarly characteristic :—

"Your friend T—— ought to be rather gentle, sitting as he just does under that heavy mare's nest of his own construction anent Hegel : *I will make him feel its weight some day.* He is certainly a very *well-informed* man, seeing that he thinks Darwin's deduction of a moral sense original! Did he ever hear of one David Hume? It was a man born 400 years ago, too, who tells us that 'in a word, man is not a beast, but he is certainly all beasts,' and that is the only truth, let the extraordinary *thoughtless* illuminati now in Great Britain say what they may. Yes, the roar is awful, but the louder it is, the sooner it will sink. It is but the reaction of the *understanding*, long kept down by the poetical and Carlyle-Emerson tendencies. *Then* a good many sincere people chafed at seeing men mount the pulpit to *say those lies*, and being unable to *speak* their disgust. They have now got power of speech—and everything that was inclined rushes thither—that is all. . . . The difficulty at present is that the mass around the arena think Darwin & Co. the *advance*. . . . The mistake is natural, but it *is* a mistake, and very unfortunate."

As being one of the "men of the Revulsion," Buckle could expect only short shrift when his reviewer was Stirling, who found in him, indeed, all the faults of his school—shallowness, verbosity and pomposity.

The review in the *North American Review* was followed, some three years later, by another in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, entitled *Mr Buckle and the Aufklärung*, which treats the subject at greater length than the first, and with a

fullness of reference to everything and everyone even remotely connected with it, which makes the article a most important and valuable one. It contains, too — as, indeed, they both do — many passages full of thought and suggestion on various points, expressed always with the vividness and vigour characteristic of the reviewer, of which only the following can be quoted here :—

"Aufklärung means *enlightenment;* and *the* Aufklärung is that reaction on the part of general intelligence against political privilege and ecclesiastical dictation which has constituted the history of Europe since Spinoza, Descartes, Bacon, or even Luther. The Aufklärung means at bottom, therefore, only that which is legitimate. No man would wish to see perpetuated the social wrongs, or the religious tyranny, of the Middle Ages; on the contrary, the historical movement that did victorious battle here must be pronounced *the* movement the most important to humanity that humanity as yet knows. It was a necessity—a necessity for the hearts and souls of men; and we now, who think and act and speak in this full freedom, ought to feel that there is imposed on us a most real burthen of the deepest gratitude to those who lived in suffering, and in suffering laboured, for what they knew full well would bring no reward to them. All honour to the Aufklärung!"

That is the right side of the Aufklärung. The reviewer reverses the medal, and shows us the wrong side :—

"Religion and State constitute humanity; and he who rejects the principles of both has ceased to be substantial and a concrete, and has become instead superficial and an abstract—a superficial, vain, opinionated, isolated *self*. Opposition to *a* religion and *a* state passes but too easily into opposition to those interests generally as such. And as for the workmen, again, it is men of the understanding merely, men of quick parts and clear intelligence, but generally light heads, shallow as to practical human sagacity, and void of any depth of feeling, that we are called on to honour as such . . . universally they are our only speakers at present — and not without an

audience. What we live in now, that is, is the result we hint at—*Aufklärung* degenerated into *Aufklärerei;* for Aufklärerei is to Aufklärung what abuse is to use, followers to leaders, criticasters to critics, poetasters to poets."

Probably there is no passage in all Stirling's writings in which the true position and character of the Aufklärung is described at the same time so shortly and so fully, though, whether in his published works, or his private letters, there was no subject to which he was so apt to be attracted, for the reason that it was to a crusade against the degenerate form of the Aufklärung that, so far as *substance* is concerned, his philosophical life was devoted. Indeed, as will be seen from the following extract from a letter to one with whom, during the later years of his life, he carried on a frequent correspondence (the Rev. John Snaith of Nottingham), it was partly to their opposition to the Aufklärung that he attributed the lack of popularity of the works both of Hegel and himself.

"I quite agree with you," he writes, "as to the colossal size of Hegel; and I agree with you too as to the Christian character of what he writes. It is in fact—to my belief—that reputed character that, in these days, largely prevents the study of him. With our Tyndalls and Huxleys, our Grotes, Buckles, Mills, Bains, nothing will go down with many but the old Aufklärung still. They have been so put against the Christian Scriptures by the Voltaires, Humes, Gibbons, etc., that they cannot believe a philosopher in earnest who will stand by the Bible. They ought to know, however, that the Aufklärung itself has been followed by its correction, and that it is now wholly out of date."

Two short articles on Strauss in the *Athenæum* for June 21 and 28, 1873, gave another opportunity for an attack on the Aufklärung and the shallow scepticism which is characteristic of it. Speaking

of the Biblical critics in Germany, whose work he regarded as one aspect of the later development of the Aufklärung, he says :—

"Hegel, from the very beginning . . . mocked the general industry with the most unaffected scorn, and insisted upon this alone—that with the investigation of *externalities* [*i.e.* such things as dates, historical events, etc.] as externalities, we had nothing whatever to do; that our whole business was to apprehend all doctrine, and make it ours through the testimony of the spirit. Accordingly, for some time back, this has been the attitude of the more earnest minds, whether in Germany or England. They regard all that wreckage of criticism . . . but as so much *lauten Lärm des Tages*, as so much idle play of the contingent."

In the second of the articles Stirling points out that the so-called "advanced thinkers," such as Strauss, and other adherents of the Aufklärung, are really behind the times. "In regard to religion," he tells us, "Dr Strauss would have done all he has done, and a little more besides, had he but referred us to David Hume, and his 'Natural History of Religion.'"

In reply to the statement by Strauss that "it must have been an ill-advised God who could fall upon no better amusement than the transforming of himself into such a hungry world as this," there occurs the following vehement, and very human passage :—

"That is but the voice of an imbecile vanity, foiled in its own impotence. We shall not speak of love, or of one's daily meals, or of science, or of Shakespeare and the musical glasses; but he who has seen the sea, and the blue of heaven, and the moon with the stars, who has clomb a mountain, who has heard a bird in the woods, who has spoken and been spoken to, who has seen a sock or a shoe of his own child, who has known a mother—he will bow the knee, and thank his God, and call it good, even though his lot in the end be nothingness. But 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast!'"

Some years later (in 1881) he wrote to Mr Hale-White—in reply, evidently, to some question on the part of the latter as to his religious position: "Let me recommend to you very specially the Note on the *Sophists* [in the *Schwegler*], and articles on Strauss and Buckle. *That* really is the best thing I have to teach. I hold my religious position to be essentially the same as what is called the Hegelian Right. . . . Hegel's son Karl is at this moment the leader of the Evangelical party in Germany. . . . What we see now, under the Mills, Buckles, Huxleys, *al.* is the continuation of the French Aufklärung in a very shallow form, and those men are supported now by the mass of the reading public, who act as if they had just opened their eyes to the monstrous absurdities and lies they had all this time been blindly believing in trust of the Church. So much is this the case that a man in my position, as supposed to stand for old benightedness, will not even be listened to at present."

In the year before the appearance of the Strauss articles (in 1872), the publication of a second edition of his *As regards Protoplasm* had given Stirling an opportunity, in a Preface, for replying to what Huxley had said in an article in the *Contemporary Review* for December 1871. It was also the occasion of the receipt, by the author, of a large number of letters from men of differing professions, habits of mind, and character—lawyers, clergymen, men of science, scholars, and *littérateurs*—each expressing enthusiastic admiration of the force of reasoning exhibited in the little book. "I cannot imagine anything more thoroughly conclusive than your essay," one correspondent writes. "It is not a chain of arguments, but a chain mail of proof." Roden Noel said of it: "That is one of the most masterly things I ever read; I never could have supposed an antagonist could have been so *very* much smashed!"

When speaking of Stirling's correspondents of this period, mention ought to have been made of Roden Noel — one of the most voluminous and (alas!) illegible of his correspondents during the "seventies," and perhaps the "eighties." Besides corresponding pretty frequently, the two met on several occasions — in Edinburgh, where Noel lunched with Stirling; at the house of Henry Bellyse Baildon, another minor poet; and at Winton Castle, where the two spent a few days together as the guests of the dowager Lady Ruthven—and the literary tastes and enthusiasms which they shared made their meetings and talks always a pleasure to both. After they became somewhat intimate, Noel admitted to Stirling: "To say the truth, from the *Secret of Hegel* and Essays, I thought you must be a *very terrible* person indeed! You do so 'walk into' Hamilton and Coleridge." In a letter dated July 1875, he pays the following valuable tribute to Stirling. "I shall always look up to you," he writes, "as to a master with whom I cannot quite agree, yet who has greatly—very greatly—helped me in thought. No one has fertilized me more—so far as I *am* fertilized!"

Others of whom Stirling saw a good deal, or from whom he heard pretty frequently in those years, were the Baildon mentioned above—a writer possessed of a genuine literary vein, whose tragic end, some twenty years later, his friends in the "seventies" were very far from foreseeing—and his intimate friend, William Renton, a man of intellectual versatility, and varied gifts and attainments —an excellent mathematician, and the writer of a volume of verses, named *Oils and Water-colours*, many of which are marked by originality, and most of them by gracefulness. These two men, being much younger than Stirling, were in the position, more or less, of disciples, as were also—probably about the same time, or a year or two later—Robert

Adamson, a keen student of philosophy, who afterwards became Professor of Logic in Glasgow University, and R. B. Haldane, who has since risen to a high place in the Government of his country, and who alone of the group now survives.

It was in 1872, on the death of Dr Maurice, that an attempt was made by friends of Stirling's and others at Cambridge, to induce him to stand as a candidate for the Knightsbridge Professorship of Moral Philosophy which Maurice had occupied; but this Stirling declined to do. Writing to his friend Cupples on the subject, he said :—

"I heard lately the *Athenæum* said I was a candidate for Maurice's chair. That is quite vexing, for it is almost *worse* than false—false, that is, and a little more. I never dreamed of applying—never dreamed of it at all—Scotland was Scotland, Cambridge was Cambridge. I was surprised — very much, however, a considerable time after M.'s death, by a letter containing others from influential Cambridge men, urging me to stand, inviting me to come up, see the ground, and live among the Fellows as long as I liked. I took 24 hours to think, and then respectfully, but decidedly, declined; and, again, within two days of the election, when Edward Caird wrote me that he had been written to from Cambridge to urge me to reconsider."

In the beginning of the following year (Jan. 1873) a review by Stirling of Professor Campbell Fraser's complete edition of Berkeley's works, appeared in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, a periodical devoted specially to the discussion of the deeper questions of philosophy, and edited by the W. T. Harris referred to in Emerson's letter to Stirling of 1868. Perhaps, in speaking of Stirling's article on Berkeley in the *Courant*, enough has already been said of his views of Berkeley's philosophy; and nothing further need be added on the subject here. The following brief extract from the

American article, however, is given simply as a proof of his high appreciation of the work of Berkeley's editor :—

"Be that as it may, the diligence, the love, the faith of Professor Fraser as an editor are, to our belief, quite unsurpassed in philosophical literature. Had we but—to say nothing of the rest—a Hume, a Kant, and a Hegel in such perfection of detail as a like untiringness of labour and research might extend them to us! For into this labour an earnest endeavour at explanation enters as no inconsiderable constituent. . . . Professor Fraser has not only laboriously pieced together all that belongs whether to the philosophical thought of Hamilton or of Berkeley, but he has read widely in philosophy generally, and is at this moment as much Philosophy's votary as any man that may be named."

The great event of the "seventies" for Stirling was, perhaps, his meeting with Emerson, which took place on the 8th of May of the same year (1873). Professor Campbell Fraser, while in London during the previous month, had had the good fortune to meet the great American, who, though then close on seventy (he passed his seventieth birthday on the voyage home), had come across the ocean with his daughter on a second visit to Britain. Learning that Emerson intended paying a hurried visit to Edinburgh, Professor Fraser invited him and Miss Emerson to dine at his house to meet Stirling and Mrs Stirling, and others. The following brief account of the meeting occurs in a letter to George Cupples, written a few days later (on May 11th) :—

"Emerson came to Edinburgh on Thursday—he wanted to show his daughter Edinburgh and Melrose (Abbotsford), he said; but he let it out pretty well that he wanted a glimpse of my unworthy self! He had met Fraser in London, and expressed to him how glad he would be to have an opportunity of meeting me. Accordingly, on

Thursday last, three hours after his arrival from the south (7 p.m.), we dined with Emerson at Prof. Fraser's. There were present only Fraser, with wife and son, Emerson with daughter, Sir A. Grant with Lady Grant and Mrs Ferrier, Russel (*Scotsman*) with wife, and self with wife.

"When the ladies retired, I was put into the chair beside Emerson, and we had a good jaw [!]. In the drawing-room, Emerson had to receive all the élite of Edinburgh . . . and I saw no more of him till on going away. Shaking hands with him then (wife and I), and asking him when we should see him again, he began to excuse himself (he 'was going away so soon,' etc., etc.), as to strangers, when I whispered our name, and he seized with effusion a hand of each, 'See you again? Of course,' etc., etc.! We had to go up to his inn next day shortly after ten. My wife and Miss Emerson went a-shopping,[1] and E. and I had three hours of it! In the evening I met him again at 'Fichte' Smith's, but I saw little of him there. . . . E. was really sorry that he could not come to 'see where my ink bottle was' on the Saturday, but he had to get to Carlisle that night, stopping at Melrose by the way."

That is all we are told of the meeting. Much as one would like to have a detailed account of "the good jaw" on the Thursday night, or a full description of the "three hours of it" on Friday morning, it is just there that we are left in the dark; and there is nothing to throw light on either—so far, at least, as is known to the present writer—either in writing, or in the memory of anyone surviving. Stirling always spoke with warmth of the mild sweetness of Emerson's look, and the mature, calm wisdom of his talk.

[1] One recollection of that "shopping" which still survives, is curiously illustrative of the difference of the common words in domestic use in America and England. Miss Emerson expressed a wish to be taken to a china shop to buy some "*bowls* and *cans* for the guest-chamber"—Anglicé, basins and ewers for the spare bedroom.

The letter to Cupples ends thus :—

"This is the thing, though—I spoke of your article on him [Emerson]—he had never seen it—I begged permission to send it him—he would read it with pleasure—I rummaged everywhere, and find some borrower has not returned my copy—I was obliged to write and apologize, adding from memory your last words . . . Now, how can we get a copy to send after him to Concord ?"

The article on Emerson referred to in the above extract had appeared, like some of Stirling's earliest writings, in Douglas Jerrold's *Shilling Magazine* so far back as April 1848, and had won the warmest admiration of the philosopher, who always spoke of it with enthusiasm as the best thing ever written on Emerson. In the brief biographical sketch of Cupples, written by Stirling in 1894, there occurs the following passage with regard to the article :—

"It is really, however, the little essay on Emerson that has always the most fascinated me : among friends I have never done calling attention to it. I have to say, too, that I never got anyone to read it who did not come to me with admiration in his eyes, and the involuntary exclamation on his lips, 'Ah, yes, Cupples is a great genius!' It is doubtless the best essay ever written in this connection. . . . Still it is not that there is anything specially very wonderful in it as said of Emerson. It is not even the admirably good, true, the perfectly temperate, but perfectly undisguised, as in fact perfectly inspired, state of mind religiously—it is not that in it, no, nor much excellence else, that arrests attention and that haunts. It is a peculiar breadth of flavour, somehow, that is spread over it throughout—a new *race*—a smack, a gust, a savour, that has never come upon one's spiritual palate before."

In a letter to Dr Ingleby, dated May 17, this further word is added with regard to the Emerson meeting :—

"He [Emerson] seems bent on my coming to America, complained of me 'turning a deaf ear' to Eliot (P. of Harvard), and said it was understood

that Bowen was to retire for me, and that they had been all much surprised. It was hardly quite so, however."

In the August following the meeting with Emerson, Stirling, accompanied by his second son, then a lad in his "teens," paid a short visit to the scenes of his early manhood in South Wales. As Stirling never travelled by land if he could possibly go by sea, they sailed to Liverpool, encountering some rough weather on the short voyage, which completely prostrated the son, but left the father well and vigorous. "At half-past six [a.m.]," he writes to Mrs Stirling, "I was thrown out [of his berth] on to the floor, with a hard blow on the breast that bothers me yet. So I dressed, and found we were in a thorough storm with rain. David horribly bad—the picture of death. . . . At ½ past 7, out of 52 only 20 showed for breakfast, where I had 2 cups of coffee, fish, ham and egg, and 3 bits of bread and butter. . . . Poor David all this time in agony."

In Wales, Stirling and his son were the guests of his old friend, Mr Menelaus, manager of the Dowlais iron works, through whom he was re-introduced to several of his old friends of twenty years before. His old "chief" of "Red Rover" memory, Frank Crawshay, was dead; but he dined at Cyfarthfa Castle with Frank's younger brother, Robert Crawshay, now the Iron King, and said to possess eight millions. At Cyfarthfa it was interesting to Stirling to find that Emerson and his daughter had been there shortly before him.

Although it was a pleasure to renew his acquaintance with old scenes and old faces, nevertheless Stirling writes to his wife: "Believe that we both ever regretfully think of you, and wish to be home."

In one of Stirling's letters to Dr Ingleby, there occurs a passage about an illness of the David mentioned above, which is so characteristic of the

philosopher in his domestic and medical aspect, that it is given here. David, then a lad of sixteen, and to all appearance in good health, complained of weakness and want of breath.

"By and by, he complained of being puffed on walking up a hill (though he said he was able to run capitally after his fit, when it blew off), and asked me to tap his chest. I pooh-poohed—tapped carelessly through coat and all—and applied ear to same coat carelessly. I heard a difference, even so, in the respiratory murmur of the two sides. But, good heavens! was the lung-horror to never cease?[1] It was either something or nothing; if something, nothing could be done; if nothing, nothing need be done. A fellow without cough, fever or pain, who ate heartily, and slept soundly all night on *either* side, could not be very bad. The complaint of puffing continued, however, and at last one night, having slipped my stethoscope into my pocket, and descended [from his study] at my usual hour, I took my station on the rug, flung up my arms, then drubbed my own chest, causing him (D.) to look up from a game of chess, and remark, 'It was all very well—if he had my chest,' etc. 'Confound your chest!' quoth I. 'Let me see your chest then.' I found effusion into the right pleura—he had had (almost without symptoms) a sub-acute pleurisy! Two of our best men here—Dr Warburton Begbie, certainly the best here, or, as I am apt to believe, for the stethoscope, anywhere else—endorsed my views of the disease and its rationale. They also agreed to the plan of treatment I proposed. He has now been a week in bed, and has made as much progress as could have been desired. Here endeth ye tale of David."

But though the patient was entirely restored to health, and the lung did not again give cause for anxiety, Stirling's troubles with respect to his son

[1] Stirling's daughter had died of an affection of the lungs.

were not yet over. Possessed of intelligence and good abilities, the lad showed a dislike for regular, steady work; and two or three years after the illness mentioned above, it was thought best that he should go abroad. An opening was found for him on a sheep-farm in Queensland belonging to a relative of Stirling's college friend, the Rev. James Simpson, who was at that time a frequent visitor at Stirling's house. To Stirling, the failure of the hopes he had set upon this son was one of the bitterest disappointments of his life, and helped greatly to deepen the gloom which seems to hang about the "seventies."

Even in the "seventies," however, things were far from being wholly gloomy. To a letter to Mr Hale-White, dated October 28, 1874, there is this somewhat characteristic postscript: "It is just possible that I have no right to grumble: the 5th edition (since 1868) of the *Schwegler* is out, or almost out, and each edition consists of a thousand copies. Then the Blackwoods got rid of 750 *Protoplasms* in a few months. *Hegel, Essays, Protoplasm* (2nd edn.) have all sold upwards of 500. The Lectures are not long out, but will have done their 250 or more. The *Hamilton*, being only a part, has done worst—some 150 remain out of 500. . . . Still *no* literary money received has yet made up my literary outlay."

When we consider that it was only nine years since the publication of the first of the books mentioned, the postscript seems to contain the record, not only of great activity on the part of the writer, but also, when the nature of his works is taken into account, of a reputation of pretty rapid growth. It is surely not often that five thousand copies of a technical philosophical work have been sold in little more than five years.

One of the bright spots in the "seventies" was, as we have seen, Stirling's meeting with Emerson,

and another was Emerson's candidature for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University, into which Stirling, as Hon. President of the club of students who nominated Emerson, threw himself warmly. His own account of the affair is contained in a letter to Cupples, dated March 23, 1874:—

"Some time ago I had to receive a deputation of Glasgow students who, having started an Independent Club to elect Rectors on general, rather than political, grounds, wished me to be their honorary Secretary.[1] As they said I should have nothing to do, I consented at last. Then they came back to consult me about their candidate for next year: I proposed Emerson. They saw him to be the very best for their principles, and were enthusiastic. Well, the result is that Emerson, a day or two ago, telegraphed to me 'yes.' Now they want me to write them a short article on Emerson."

The article was written, and appeared in the little paper, which the club issued as the organ of their principles, and in support of their candidate. In a sentence the writer upholds the principles of the Independents; then, at greater length, defends Emerson from the charge of "heterodoxy"; and finally contrasts the two great writers of the time, Carlyle and Emerson. The following passage is quoted from the article:—

"Now the objection [of heterodoxy] is important, and it will be well for us to see the limits and general nature of what it has in view. We have all heard the same objection vehemently, violently, and even coarsely urged against Thomas Carlyle . . . where in his writings is there any *expression* of this terrible heterodoxy of his? I know of none. Is it really to be supposed that Carlyle sympathizes with such revolutionary views in religion and otherwise as characterize our Buckles and our Bains, or Mills and Huxleys? No; the contrary is the truth. There is in Carlyle something like hatred for all such

[1] "Secretary" here must be a slip. Stirling was certainly *Hon. President* of the Independent Club.

views, and the whole soul of him is a reaction from infidelity to faith . . . for every human being whom Carlyle has taken from the Church, he has restored ninety-nine to it. . . . Nor with Emerson is it essentially different; there are in him, doubtless, expressions that infer heterodoxy; still religion is the very element he breathes; and the reader can hardly open a page of his, whether in poetry or prose, but he will find it so. Here, in fact, is the history of the matter. Against the unbelief of the 18th century, there was, on the appearance of our modern poetry, a complete reaction. This reaction, again, was only strengthened and deepened by the writings as well of Carlyle as of Emerson, who form no part of, but are directly opposed to, the shallow *Revulsion* (at the hands of Mill and others) under which we at present live. Each of the two, indeed, is a deep, sincere, and earnest man, who sees the universe and the divinity that is in it; and to mix up either with a Mill or a Huxley is to commit as great a mockery of the truth as to mix up a Hegel with a Strauss. . . . No; men like these—our Carlyles and our Emersons—understand the days they live in; and they would save the Bible for the people that such 'Saturday nights' as the 'Cottar's' might be long in the land. Of Emerson in particular we may almost say that *holiness* is his very attribute proper; we cannot think of him but as radiant-faced under the cathedral roof of the meeting trees, with naked front uplifted as to the stained glass windows of the coloured west. He is the dominican of the woods, water is his drink, and almost the air is enough for him."

Once in London, on the occasion of a lecture delivered by Emerson, at which Carlyle was present on the platform, Stirling had seen the two great men together; and in his article he thus describes and contrasts them:—

"What contrast it was to look upon them! Emerson the calm, the chastened, the unmoved—motionless, emotionless—a being on whom the outward world could not make a mark, but still the slouching, as it were, and retiring scholar . . . Carlyle like a wild St John of the wilderness, with fire and smoke of genius rolling through him ever; his thick dark hair (it may be, in contempt of Gall) confused upon his forehead, shutting it from view, and

the Rousseau of his nature glancing from his eye the question (I thought), Do any recognize me here? Emerson was the latest known to me, and I had but listened to his words, and ah! I said to myself, Carlyle may be the intellectual, but Emerson is the moral; Carlyle may be heart and brain, but Emerson is will, and law, and purpose; Carlyle may be motion, but Emerson is rest; Carlyle may be the *eagle* that has swept with me from my desert, but he has only borne me, nevertheless, to this *rock* Emerson."

When the Independent Club had first proposed to adopt Emerson as their candidate, some doubt had been felt as to whether, as being an alien, he was eligible for the office, and Stirling had written to various legal authorities to consult them on the question. The decision arrived at was that there was no law by which Emerson would be disqualified from being elected as Lord Rector. Stirling, then, wrote to him, offering him the support of the Independent Club, if he would consent to be nominated as their candidate; and he replied in the following letter:—

"CONCORD, MASSTTS.,
18 *March* '74.

"MY DEAR DOCTOR STIRLING,—Your letter, which I received a week ago, and that of the University Club, which came with it, I confess, astonished me, and, but for their agreement, I should have hesitated upon their authenticity. Of this most agreeable compliment a quiet scholar could receive, your careful and accurate statement was a perfect confirmation. I have no fancy for unnecessary voyaging, and plenty of duties here at home, being a slow workman, but I cannot find it in my heart to decline the honouring request of my correspondents to use my name, though to me it appears impossible that they should carry their point at the election. And I hope they will withdraw it at once on finding it imprudent to

proceed: and you must emphasize this wish to them. I doubt the young men have no guess how unskilful a chairman I should prove, if their remote point should be actually reached. But I am delighted by their spontaneous and undreamed-of regard, which honours both them and me. I wish no tenderness, for I have no ambition, and their own volition in this proposal is the real honour. I give you sincere thanks for your kind interest in my behalf, and the perfect information of your letter. I am recently again and again in your debt for English papers, and I enjoy all the science in them that I understand, and am always on your side. With these letters — this and one to the Committee—I carry my *Yes* to the Boston Ocean telegraph, addressed to you,—which you shall have received, I trust, a fortnight ago, when these greetings reach you from your friend,

"R. W. Emerson."

Encouraged by Emerson's gracious acceptance of their proposal, the leaders of the Independent Club threw themselves into the rectorial contest with the utmost energy and enthusiasm. The leading spirit of the group was the President of the Club, William Robertson Herkless, a young man whose intellectual ability and strength of character enabled him to surmount great physical obstacles in the way of his career. Born without the use of his lower limbs, he would not permit his infirmity to prevent his daily attendance in the class-rooms of the University during the necessary number of years before undergoing examination for an Arts and a legal degree, nor, later, did he allow it to interfere with his fulfilment of the duties of a professor in St Mungo's College, Glasgow. Stirling had the highest respect for Mr Herkless's intellectual gifts and sound judgment; and during the succeeding years, he, with his brother, Mr John

Herkless (now Professor of Church History in St Andrews University), and his brother-in-law—the Rev. John Wellwood, a young man of literary and poetic gifts—were among the most intimate, and the most esteemed, of the philosopher's younger friends.

In spite of all the efforts of the Independents, they did not succeed in securing the Rectorship for their candidate; but considering the strength of the two great political parties which they had to oppose, that they actually obtained over five hundred votes for a non-political candidate may fairly be regarded as a victory. Emerson himself so regarded it, as will be seen from the following letter:—

"CONCORD, 5 *January* 1875.

"MY DEAR DOCTOR STIRLING,—I cannot forgive myself for my tardiness in telling you how deeply I have felt your interest and care in my behalf at Glasgow. Please place it to the account of my daughter, who has spoiled her father by answering letters for him in a large variety of cases, until I have grown to a dangerous habit of postponing the most commanding duties. Yet I was and still am deeply sensible of your heroic generosity in the care of my interest in the late election. I could never from the first to the last act in the affair bring myself to believe that the brave nomination of the Independents would succeed, and could hardly trust the truth of the telegram which at last brought me so dignified a result as five hundred voters in our behalf. I count that vote as quite the fairest laurel that has ever fallen on me, and I cannot but feel deeply grateful to my young friends in the University, and to yourself who have been their counsellor and my too partial advocate. Of course, such an approach to success gave me lively thoughts of what could

have been attempted and at least approached in meeting and dealing with the University, if my friends had succeeded: but I hope the stimulus they have given me will not be wholly lost. Probably I have never seen one of these five hundred young men: and thus they show us that our recorded thoughts give the means of reaching those who think with us in other countries, and make closer alliances sometimes than life-long neighbourhood. To be sure the truth is hackneyed, but it never came to me in so palpable a form.

"It is easy for me to gather from your letters, and from those of Mr Herkless, and from the printed papers, how generously you have espoused and aided my champions, and it only adds one more to the many deep debts which I owe to you. I never lose the hope that you will come to us at no distant day and be our king in philosophy.—With affectionate regards,

"R. W. EMERSON."

CHAPTER XVI

1876-1884

Presidential Address to the Glasgow University Independent Club—Accident in Orkney—*I am that I am*—Publication of *Burns in Drama*, etc.—Articles on Kant—Stirling's Conclusion regarding Kant

THE years with which this chapter deals, or, at least, the latter portion of them, might not unfairly, perhaps, be regarded as forming the Kantian period in Stirling's life. We have seen how, in 1870, Mr Hale-White had in vain urged Stirling to bring out the exposition of Kant referred to in the *Secret of Hegel*. Four years later, Mr G. H. Lewes (who, though a distinguished *littérateur*, and author of a *History of Philosophy*, is perhaps more generally known to the public as the husband of "George Eliot") kindly offered to try to make arrangements for the publication of a book on Kant by Stirling, as he had been told that Stirling was withholding such a work from publication, because he "did not feel justified in incurring the expense with so precarious a return."

This kindly offer Stirling did not see his way to accept, and it was not till seven years later (in 1881) that his *Text-book to Kant* made its appearance. In the interval, however (from 1879 onwards), a succession of articles by him on Kant were published —chiefly in American journals.

The years 1876-77 are perhaps the two consecutive years in Stirling's life, during the twenty that followed the publication of the *Secret*, in which the least philosophical work made its appearance; but it must not be supposed that the philosopher was idle during the period. In March 1876, as President of

the Independent Club of Glasgow University, Stirling took the Chair at the annual dinner of the Club, and in proposing the toast of the evening, made a speech which was described in the Press at the time as "beautiful" and "eloquent." As was of course natural, if not necessary, considering the nature of the toast, the theme of the speech was that the University is not the place, nor youth the time, for the struggle of party politics. "Why," the speaker asked, "should it be at all sought to introduce party motives, party passion, and party violence, the confusion and the tumult of the streets, into the quiet and the calm of the Academy?" And then, in a passage in which he is almost, if not quite, at his best, he continues :—

"Literature, and science, and philosophy—that is the even stratification of eternity, that is the diamond flooring of the universe. Why should such divine foundations, such majestic order, be broken up by the disturbing upthrow of the mean and transitory hour? What have the young to do with such an element? What is Whig or Tory to them? Why, a single image, the turn of a phrase, a single golden word is more to them than all the party strifes that have divided the country since the Revolution and the Settlement. . . . The student is the denizen of a temple, why should its calm ether be invaded by the huckster rancidities of the shop? Disenchantment and the daily struggle will come soon enough. Why grudge young men the cathedral quiet, the œcumenical serenity, of the few years that lay the foundations of their manhood? Surely it is not good that party political bias—often, too, for life—should be forced upon our young men before they have come, in very many cases, to form a single thought of their own on the subject of politics at all. . . . A University is for the Universal, not for the Particular; for principles, and not for the hungry struggles of the individual. . . . They [political opinions] are convictions with the fewest, and but inheritances of blood with most. How, then, the influence of the Independent Club is to act beneficially here is at once obvious—by example, namely, and by delaying considerations of politics till the resultant principles would be principles of one's own, and of ripe validity."

Surely, only a little reflection is required to convince anyone of the truth of both assertions maintained here—that a University is not the fit arena for party strife, and that student years—the years before life has brought "the drooping flower of knowledge changed to fruit of wisdom"—are not the time to take part in it.

It is probably to 1876 that two undated letters, addressed to Mrs Stirling, belong. The philosopher had taken a little holiday to his beloved Firth of Clyde; and after spending a night at Rothesay, had gone to Gourock, the view from which he believed to be the finest in the world. It is from the hotel at Gourock that the following little letter—given here as an example of Stirling's familiar style—is written:—

"My dear Jeanock,—Ain't I good? I did not expect to be here, but here I *is*.

"Got up shortly after 7—breakfasted about 8—ate 2 eggs and ham in proportion—drank two large cups of coffee. Walked to Schoolock by Ascog—returning over hill—an hour and 20 minutes the one way—½ hour less the other. Steamer to Innellan, Wemyss Bay, Largs and Millport. Return to Innellan—thence here. Have just had tea and a steak. Morning fine—afterwards rather leaden and brown—east wind. Rothesay delightful—after all, nothing like view from Ashton [by Gourock]—More at home here. To-morrow by Kilcreggan to Gareloch. Love to all my darlings.—Ever affectionately your James."

In July of the following year (1877) Stirling broke through his usual habit of taking his holiday down the Clyde by going on a very short trip to Orkney—with unfortunate consequences! Starting from home on a Tuesday, he writes from Inverness on the evening of the same day: "The scenery was well worth seeing . . . Still there is nothing like

the Clyde. For beauty or for roughness, you have on the Clyde what nothing on this ride will come up to." On the following evening he wrote from Dingwall, where he stayed the night, taking train on the morning of Thursday to Thurso, whence he crossed over to Stromness. It was on the day after his arrival at Stromness (Friday) that his accident occurred. He was hurrying home to his hotel, late in the evening after a trip to Kirkwall, and, thanks to the gathering dusk and his own short sight, did not observe the kerb-stone before the door of the inn (the streets being everywhere else level and pavementless), tripped, and fell with force, breaking his right arm above the elbow.

With his characteristic determination he did not permit himself to believe what he did not want to believe—that the arm was broken—declined to have a doctor summoned, and resolved that the accident should not delay his return on the following morning. He got through the night as well as he could, and with the help of the "Boots," managed to get his clothes on, and his bag packed in time to catch the steamer that sailed for Thurso at eight in the morning. Passengers were rowed out to the steamer in a small boat, and the most terrible moment for Stirling was when he was hoisted, helpless, up the side to the steamer's deck. He travelled all that day (Saturday) and the following night, taking no food in case of inducing fever; and arrived at home on Sunday morning, with his right arm in a sling, and a bag in his left hand, dirty, dusty, haggard and worn-looking, but indomitable still, and even triumphant at having accomplished his purpose. Even after finding himself at home, it was some time before he could be persuaded that the arm was really broken, and that a doctor should be sent for. In spite of the delay which had taken place between the accident and the setting of the arm, the break healed well and rapidly, and in a

very short time the patient was up, and going about his usual avocations.

The only writing of any sort which Stirling seems to have published in 1877 was the strange lines, *I am that I am: an Interpretation and a Summary*, which appeared in the October number of the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.

The lines in question, if not always musical or poetic, are unquestionably impressive, and perhaps also valuable as in some sort a summary of the Hegelian system. The following short extracts are surely striking and suggestive :—

"I never was, nor will be, but I am ;
And all that was, or will be, is but Me.
Here is the mystery, and here the veil
That never was by mortal man upraised.
Hearken ! *There is*, and *that* there is, is but
The one necessity, th' eternal *must :*
Matter that, starred into itself, is form,
And form that, struck, even as a crystal struck,
Is matter. . . . . .
. . . . Yea, I am one ;
But my own ratio fills me, which, secerned
Apart from me, is no more me, but mine—
The world !—even externality in play.
One absolute proportion is the whole,
One sole relation, whose correlatives
Are at once the multitudinous vast
And unity—finite and infinite,—
Matter and mind,—the creature and its God."

Perhaps to one who knows nothing of Hegel, these lines may appear merely vague and general ; but anyone acquainted with the Hegelian system will see in almost every line a definite meaning.

The lines quoted above are followed by others containing, as it were, the moral of the piece :—

"Enjoy
Thou me, and let my will be thine alone :
The one is many, and the many one.
Herein is peace divine, and the great life
That is the All—: Shakespeare and Socrates,
And poets old, prophets and saintly priests,

The woods, the sea, the glory of the stars,
Man and the life of man, in streets, in fields,
Children and the woman by the hearth—Love!
Nor doubt that He, Jesus of Nazareth,
Will make thee sweet in life, and in death mine."

In the following year (1878) Stirling included the above lines in the volume which he published, entitled *Burns in Drama, together with Saved Leaves*, to which allusion has frequently been made in the earlier chapters of the present book.

The *Burns* volume is an example of the influence of external circumstances, extrinsic considerations, on the success or failure of a book. The volume contains enough, and more than enough, if wisely placed before the critics and the public, to have made the reputation of a writer. Indeed, many writers in recent times have earned even high renown who did not possess anything like the original literary genius—the power of vivid writing, the exuberance of imagery — which is visible in almost every page of the little book. There was something in the form of the book, however—perhaps its "get-up," perhaps its title, suggesting, as it did, the clearing out of the desk—which made the smaller fry of newspaper critics fall foul of it at once, though some more thoughtful reviewers spoke of some of the pieces with warmth and enthusiasm. One, indeed, was of opinion that, "in point of general literary merit, the book is superior to anything Dr Stirling has published," and that *I am that I am* was "the most luminous piece of metaphysical poetry in existence." "But all," he concluded, "have a poetical individuality, and an imaginative grasp which enables us to endorse the opinion expressed of the author's first prose work, that his powers in this direction were sufficient to 'stock an aviary of popular poets.'"

In spite of the warm encouragement which he received from literary friends and correspondents,

such as Roden Noel, W. T. Harris (who had sat up to read the *Burns* from 9 p.m. till 4 a.m.), and George Cupples, Stirling felt keenly the unfavourable reception with which the book met from the Press in general. That he was, in a certain sense, partly to blame for this reception, he himself came to see, as is evident from the following sentence in a letter to Cupples, dated Dec. 18, 1878:—

"No more do *I* like the get-up of my last book—and you are quite right in calling it a 'mistake.' I wish I had to do it again. The preface, and the sub-preface to *Merla*, are great blunders, and I should have put no dates but the printed ones. I have given a key-note of apology for immaturity; and the reader on the outside is not to be blamed who thinks he has to do with a juvenile reprint. Now, saving the *Merla* (which some readers will think best even, for its prodigality of young wealth), there is nothing unripe in the whole volume—I should not hesitate to subscribe every other piece even at these years. Of course, *Belshazzar*, too, is a little young, and the *Blacksmith*, etc., are neither here nor there."

It is pleasing to note, however, that there are signs at present of an awakening interest in the *Burns*—an awakening sense of its value and importance. A writer in the *Glasgow Herald* of June 10 of the present year says of it:—

"One hopes that the dust on the little book was not too abundant, since it is representative of the best that the Scottish mind has thought concerning the national poet. . . . It is the secret of Burns that interests us here, and it cannot be doubted that Stirling possessed that, and, further, that in *Burns in Drama* he imparts it in singularly vivid and memorable fashion. . . . *Burns in Drama*, then, must not be regarded merely as one of a philosopher's diversions. The whole strength of the author is given to the task of interpretation. We are spared both apology and patronage. Burns reveals and criticizes himself. . . . There is something of hero-worship in *Burns in Drama*, but the worship

is offered in the Temple of Truth. One feels that, as near as may be, Stirling gives us the real Burns. . . . It was Stirling's conviction that Burns was 'sound at the core: his soul was the light of love for truth, indignant lightning at the wrong.' It is this belief, richly expressed, that makes his play one of the treasures of our literature."

In the year in which the *Burns* volume made its appearance, two of the series of articles on Kant were written, and both were published in January 1879—the one in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, and the other in the *Princeton Review*. Mr Libbey, the editor of the latter magazine, had written to Stirling, in January 1878, requesting him to contribute an "elaborate article of about thirty pages" on "the philosophy of law, or some kindred subject," the payment for which was to be at the rate of about £2, 2s. a page. Stirling replied, offering an article on "Causality"; and, the offer being accepted, the article, which was entitled *Philosophy of Causality: Hume and Kant*, was written, and sent to America in the following July. A few months later, what its author called a "consort article," *Schopenhauer in Relation to Kant*, was sent to Dr Harris for the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*.

As regards the contents of those two articles, not much need be said here. They are, perhaps, too technical for a book such as the present, which does not profess to give even a superficial exposition of the philosophy with which Stirling was associated, but only at most to lead up, as it were, to the doorway of it. That doorway, as has already more than once been said, was the principle of Causality. It was to the credit of David Hume that he was perhaps the first clearly to see the importance of this principle; it was to his *discredit* that his object was to get rid of it, to rob it of its authority as a *necessary* principle, or, as Stirling at times names such principles, a *universal*. As the upholder of a

sceptical philosophy, it was his business to shake belief in all principles, all necessity. Now, there is no principle more deeply rooted in the human mind —none more invariably assumed as the basis of reasoning—than the principle of causality, *Every change must have a cause*. As has already been said, every intelligence yields to this principle an obedience as unhesitating as that which every particle of matter in the universe yields to the law of gravitation. In fact, the two principles are, in their respective spheres, the counterpart of each other; and were it possible to do away with both—with the law of gravitation and the principle of causality—the results in the world of matter and the world of mind would be precisely the same. The absence of gravitation would lead to a general dissolution of the physical universe—the break-up of the solar system, and the disintegration of the earth into its component particles; the absence of causality would dissolve human knowledge into a confused, unconnected jumble of isolated facts, and (in the practical world) would result in the paralysis of human action, as Stirling says:—

"Hume's sagacity was true to the scent here, and led him straight, as it were, to the *linch-pin of existence*. Were a man minded to establish scepticism, how could he more directly or definitively accomplish his purpose than by loosening the knot that bound an effect to its cause? Mathematics apart, it was the ground, Hume saw, of our theory and practice everywhere. Above all, it was specially the ground of *belief*. At all times that we pass from present impression to some different idea [*e.g.* from effect to cause, or *vice versa*] with *belief*, it is the principle of causality mediates the connection, and supports the inference: evidently, then, if . . . we would shake belief, it is with that principle we must begin the attack . . . causality actually *is* the strongest principle of association. . . . We have only to attend to any one day's experience to become convinced that causality is our very genius, whether for theory or practice. Hume, then, knows well what he is about. . . . He is minded that causality should be

regarded as alone the nerve of reasoning, and into it he concentratingly eliminates all the other relations. Nero-like, he would have a single neck, and decapitate reason at a blow."

This philosophical Nero, in fact, having found causality to be the "linch-pin of existence," proceeds, as it were, to withdraw the pin, and let existence fall to pieces. The pin he finds is not composed, as is usually believed, of the iron of necessity, but of the cobweb of custom. He can find no philosophical warrant for the *necessity* which is universally believed to bind cause with effect but *custom*. Two events which have always been seen to follow each other in the same order—*e.g.*, the blowing of the wind and the rising of the waves, the lowering of the temperature and the freezing of water, the shining of the sun and the warming of the stone—become associated together in our minds as cause and effect.

"*Every change must have a cause.* Yes, said Hume, but such an affair as change can only be known by experience; without experience it would be unknown. Consequently, then, it is but a fact of experience, and, like every other such fact, we know that it *is*, but not that it *must* be. The necessity we attribute to its appearance is only a necessity of custom."[1]

It was Kant's attempt to reply to Hume here that led to his entire system of philosophy.

"Kant's whole work (and what alone led to all the others—Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) rose out of one consideration only. What was—whence was—that very strange and peculiar species of necessity to which Hume had drawn attention in the phenomena of cause and effect? That was the one spore, as it were, the bean on the stalk of which, up there in the clouds, there rests the palace of more than one giant—perhaps in dream. In a word, to Kant metaphysic itself, to us the *Kritik of Pure Reason*—nay, Ger-

[1] From Stirling's article on Kant in Chambers's *Encyclopædia*, where the relative positions of Hume and Kant are stated at the shortest and clearest.

man philosophy as a whole—has absolute foundation in the *whence* or *why* of *necessary connexion*. Such necessary connexion exhibited itself, in the course of the reflections of Kant, not as confined to causality alone, but as common (and, at the same time, peculiar) to all the propositions that collectively constituted what science there was of metaphysic proper."[1]

As was said in a former chapter in connection with Newton and Hegel, the instinct of the true philosopher leads him to be indifferent to what merely *is*—to mere fact—and to endeavour to discover what *must be*, which to him is alone *truth*. "To explain is to reduce an *is* to a *must*." Kant's whole industry was devoted to the discovery of the source and origin of the *must* that is present in Every change *must* have a cause, and other such propositions — *i.e.*, universal, necessary principles. He saw at once that Hume's explanation "custom" did not meet the case.

"If I ask you for an insight, an intellectual perception, into the *reason* of a *truth*, universal and common to us all, it is in vain to refer me to a mere *feeling*, an instinctive feeling, of my own, that has only grown up in me in consequence of my just being in the habit of, from day to day, seeing such things. When this dropping of a particle of ink occasions a stain on the paper, I am sure that there is a reason for it that does not lie in me, but in the things themselves. You cannot stave me off by saying the reason you want is just that you have seen the same thing before, and you have got into the habit of expecting it; the supposed necessity is but a *feeling* of yours. . . . The necessity of union, conjunction, or connexion in this latter case [the connexion of ink-drop and paper-stain], let its source be what it may, let it depend on what it may, let its reason, its *rationale* be what it may, lies manifestly obviously, evidently—self-evidently—in the facts themselves. It is not in me, it is not a feeling of mine; it is a thing that, as having a reason of its own, I want to see into."

So Stirling represents Kant as objecting to

[1] *Kant has not answered Hume*, article by Stirling in *Mind*, No. XXXVII. (Jan. 1885).

Hume's explanation of causal necessity; yet his own explanation—the explanation of Kant—reached after years of intellectual toil, after the erection of a huge, complicated system, Stirling finds to be, in ultimate analysis, no better, no less *subjective*, than that of Hume. "Kant has not answered Hume" is the conclusion he reaches, meaning thereby that, though Kant proved that the solution of the problem of causality offered by Hume was insufficient, that which he himself offered — infinitely more elaborate and complicated—was no more satisfactory. The source of the *necessity* of which we are conscious in such principles as Every change must have a cause, he (Kant) found in certain *à priori* forms of reasoning in the mind itself. The necessity was, in fact, simply *imposed* upon the facts concerned by ourselves.

"Kant's position in the end is no more and no better than that of Hume himself *when he referred to instinct.* And Kant was blind to all this! The plaything, after such long years, and with such infinite toil, he had made for himself, was so beautiful that he could see naught else. An *à priori* sense, all the functions of an *à priori* understanding, discovered—enumerated even with warrant of completeness—metaphysic, pure science, philosophy at last! These balks, and beams, and cylinders, and wheels—even in their uncouthness—imposed upon all the world."

This last extract is taken from the second of the articles entitled *Kant has not answered Hume*, which appeared in *Mind* in October 1884 and January 1885 respectively, and may fairly be taken as representing Stirling's last word on the subject, though there *is* a later (in entire agreement with the above) to be found in the last but one of his published works, *What is Thought?* (published in 1900). In all his writings on Kant, the conclusion he reaches is practically the same. The following extract from an article in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* for October 1880, entitled *Criticism of*

Kant's Main Principles, is, as far as substance is concerned, identical with those given above :—

"In disputing any position, it is always not only fair, but an absolute requisite for success, to set that position accurately in the light in which it was seen by its own promoter. Now, Kant's own most general word in this reference is his adduction of the standpoint of Copernicus. . . . 'Copernicus, not getting on well in explaining the movements of the heavens on the assumption that the entire starry host turned round the spectator, tried whether it would not succeed better with him if he supposed the spectator to turn and the stars to remain at rest.' This, he intimated, is what in his own sphere he himself has attempted. If perception is to adapt itself to the object (this is the burden of his further remark), then all knowledge must be waited for, *must be à posteriori*, and *cannot be à priori;* but an *à priori* knowledge becomes quite possible in idea, should the object have to adapt itself to the perception (because then, plainly, the conditions to which it must adapt itself being discovered, would amount to *à priori* elements of actual perception). This, then, is the single Kantian point of issue; and if we withdraw it, we withdraw at once all. Now, there is no question but that this point is withdrawn. Let our perception be submitted as it may to sensational signs, it is quite certain that it attains at last to a knowledge of an independent external universe, which is in itself a rational system for our *exploitation*. So far, then, it is quite certain that Kant's idealism, like all *subjective* idealism of what name so ever, must perish, or has perished. But still it is of interest to see how, *even on its own terms*, the system is inadequate and fails."

Then after a rapid glance over the main features of the Kantian theory of perception, the article ends thus :—

"Only . . . the enormous construction has been so imposingly laid out with specious distinction, and plausible name after plausible name, that it was no wonder the brave, good, true, clear-minded, fertile-minded Kant took in—not the whole world (for we are 'mostly fools'), but his own honest and perfectly transparent self. And having said this, we need not say what may be similarly said of

the categories themselves, or any other of the main Kantian presuppositions. They are all alike—baseless contrivances (ingenious enough, laborious enough) towards the impossible realization of an equally baseless assumption."

The chain of reasoning by which Stirling was led to the conclusion indicated here is obviously beyond the scope of the present book; and we can therefore only refer any who desire to follow it out to the *Text-book to Kant*, and the various Kantian articles mentioned above. Any unprejudiced reader who will carefully study all or any of these will feel that the conclusion which Stirling reaches is unavoidable, the reasoning irresistible. Such at any rate was the opinion of the various critics and experts, who read the *Text-book* and the various articles at the time of their appearance. The reviewer of the *Text-book* in the *British Quarterly Review* said of it:—

"From the first page to the last, the capable reader feels that he is in the hands of a master for whom there are no insolubilities in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and who has overcome and resolved the difficulties which it has heretofore presented, because he has himself advanced to a standpoint in the development of philosophical thought from which he can look back upon, and take a bird's-eye view of, the whole ground. . . . But we take it that it will more and more be acknowledged the more this volume is studied that, besides interpreting and reconstructing Kant, Dr Stirling has contributed a permanent and precious possession to philosophical thought. . . . His interpretation of Kant seems to us the one intelligible exposition of the sage of Königsberg, in all he accomplished and half-unconsciously aimed at, which has yet been produced."

Another critic wrote with regard to the same book:—

"The daylight of pure intellect is everywhere, and as we go more fully into the volume, we find a mastery of imaginative, and almost picturesque, treatment which reveals that in Dr Stirling there exists the rare combina-

tion of the poetic with the scientific temperament. The biographical sketch of Kant is fresh and new. . . . Brief and compact as it is, we learn more from its few pages both of the man and the philosopher, Immanuel Kant, than could be got from many a thick volume. . . . Our conviction is that this is one of the few books that will never be superseded, and we are equally certain that no student of Kant within our universities, or outside them, can afford to dispense with it for a single day, for here he has Kant finally put before him."

Practically the same opinion is expressed in an article in *Mind* for April 1882, signed by one who now stands in the front ranks of philosophical teachers and thinkers.[1] The following brief extracts are taken from the article:—

"With laborious faithfulness and his own unique power of exposition, Dr Stirling places the theory of the *Critique* before his readers precisely as it took shape in its author's head. Every effort is made to expound from the standpoint of Kant . . . but there is no attempt at throwing into the shade the real contradictions of the theory. Kant is presented to us with all his imperfections on his head, and we are apt to wonder, before the end, how he could possibly have believed his own theory, so plainly does it show as a 'figment in the air'—'a house of straw.' In this respect, Dr Stirling's faithfulness to his original may almost be styled merciless. Nevertheless, there is the clearest evidence that it was precisely this 'figment' with which Kant supposed himself to answer Hume. Dr Stirling's rehabilitation is, therefore, a contribution of the highest value to the history of philosophy. He has done his work in such a way that it will never require to be done again."

To this published testimony, the following from private letters may be added. Writing in November 1883 with respect to Stirling's article, *The Question of Idealism in Kant*, which appeared in *Mind* for October of that year, Professor Veitch of Glasgow University says: "It has the usual characteristic grip, clearness, and *go*—go straight at it—of your

[1] Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, Professor of Logic in Edinburgh University, author of *From Kant to Hegel*, etc.

other writings. . . . The more I ponder over the Kantian position, the more I am inclined to think that you have hit the system at the heart—in quite a paragraph—*e.g.*, as that on p. 18 of your article."

Seventeen years later, on the publication of Stirling's last important work, *What is Thought?* this brief, but characteristic, note was received from Professor Simon Laurie, of whom we shall see more in a later chapter :—

"Poor Immanuel!! How will you dare to look him in the face when you get to heaven?

"S. S. L.

"*Jan.* 4/00.

"Perchance there are no categories *there*."

It will be evident to all from the above extracts, both from Stirling's own writings and those of others, that he was not in sympathy with the cry which was raised a few years ago, among certain philosophical writers and students, of "Back to Kant." Stirling had the highest regard for Kant, both as a man and a philosopher. "Kant himself," he said, "is well worth understanding, both in himself and in his writings. Few worthier men have ever lived than Kant, and few writers have said as much sound sense as he on the most important interests of humanity."[1] And again, speaking of the *Ethics* of Kant: "So much has Kant what he writes at heart here that all seems to issue at once from within him in a single breath. No purer, no more living, morality has ever been professionally produced by philosopher than glows in the *Ethics* of Kant."[2]

Nevertheless, even while admitting so much, Stirling has made it quite plain that, in his opinion, it is no longer in the vessel of Kant that the Historic Pabulum is contained; it is not in the

[1] *Kant has not answered Hume*, Part II.
[2] Article *Kant* in *Chambers's Encyclopædia.*

works of Kant that we shall find "the choicest aliment of humanity — such aliment as nourishes us strongly into our true stature." Philosophy has moved beyond Kant; the Historic Pabulum has passed into the vessel of a philosopher whom Stirling does not hesitate to describe as "even infinitely deeper" than Kant. Kant's real value to philosophy is historical—he forms an indispensable link in the chain of the Philosophic Succession. But for the Categories of Kant we should not have had the system of Hegel. "Who sees that a touch converts Kant into Hegel, and yet that the latter, after all, is to the former very much as reality to dream?"[1]

"But be that as it may, and assuming the constructions of Kant to prove in themselves neither a solution for the problem of the universe, nor yet for the problem of causality, we have still to bear in mind what *suggestion* in his regard means . . . the truth is that it is to Kant we owe—with discount only of all necessary historical addition—our entire metaphysical material at present. Really, whatever metal of speculation is anywhere turned out now, the *ore* of it was Kant's.[2]

"There was but one movement, and every one of the four [Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel] accepted it. . . . This movement is to be called Kantian, and Kantian alone; for it was Kant began it, and throughout its whole course, the one simple and single pivot of it was expressly and exclusively Kant's."[3]

Nevertheless, while admitting what is stated in this last extract — that the whole movement of German philosophy, from Kant onwards, may not unjustly be called Kantian, since it originated with Kant, Stirling declares, in the very book from which that extract is taken (*What is Thought?*), that "return to Kant" is impossible. We can *not*, he says, "return to Kant . . . if we must return—

[1] *Schopenhauer in Relation to Kant.*
[2] Article *Kant* in *Chambers's Encyclopædia.*
[3] *What is Thought?* p. 390.

foundationally—and do return, to his Apperception and his Categories — we can *not* return to his *theoretical* philosophy as a whole, much as we may rise to the truths in his *practical* philosophy."

"It is the Categories of Kant *made* Hegel," he says (in the *Categories*, p. 151). "Yes! but what did Hegel make of *them?* His score of volumes—his whole twenty-one volumes—are *his* making of them."

Finally, to conclude the subject of Kant here, this sentence from *Kant has not answered Hume*, may be given as Stirling's last word with regard to it: "The blunder itself [*i.e.*, Kant's blunder], if it is a blunder, has been the source, perhaps, of *the most prodigious truth.*"